# *28,000 Deaths in '78 Investigated by Office Of Medical Examiner*

By HOWARD BLUM

All the cases examined by the office of the city's Medical Examiner have one thing in common — death.

The very last moments of an individual's life are the very beginnings of the investigations by the Medical Examiner's office. These investigations, directed by the Chief Medical Examiner, are conducted by a full-time staff of 151, including 18 pathologists. There are offices in each of the city's boroughs.

The Medical Examiner's office has an annual budget of $3.5 million. The Chief Medical Examiner gets $50,000 a year.

The Medical Examiner enters a case when a death occurs in a public place, if the dead person has not been attended by a physician in the last week of life, if there is the death of a person in seeming good health or if there is suspicion of unnatural death.

Last year the Medical Examiner's office investigated 28,000 deaths, about a third of all deaths in the city, and it performed more than 8,000 autospies.

The Chief Medical Examiner is appointed by the Mayor from among the top three qualifiers on a Civil Service examination.

The Mayor's refusal yesterday to make permanent the appointment of Dr. Michael Baden as Chief Medical Examiner is only the most recent controversy surrounding an office that has had a history of being subject to charges and countercharges.

In 1973 the office, then under the direction of Dr. Milton Helpern, came under attack when it was revealed that someone in the office had severed the head of an unidentified woman who was believed to have drowned, buried her body in a potter's field without an autospy , and only later discovered by chance that the head contained a bullet.